

Using Geofish to estimate potential catch loss for the fishery sector

Pecceu Ellen, Allegaert Wim, Vanelslander Bart, Polet Hans and Van Hoey Gert

Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO), Fisheries and Aquatic Production,
Ankerstraat 1, 8400 Oostende, Belgium
E-mail: ellen.pecceu@ilvo.vlaanderen.be

For several decades, the fishing industry is under pressure due to high fuel costs and catch limitations (declining stocks), but also the available fishing grounds are increasingly regulated by numerous (European) directives. Besides that, - fishers also operate in territorial waters which are regulated by several national jurisdictions. In addition, a more intensive use of marine space and new stakeholders lead to a greater competition between the fishing industry and other maritime sectors. All of this makes it difficult to keep a clear overview of the actual space for fisheries. Therefore, we created the information platform “Geofish” (www.geofish.be), which presents available geographic information in multiple layers in an online consultable system. The Belgian fishing fleet, wherefore it is developed in first instance, operates in a wide region (from Irish Sea to the Greater North Sea), facing a lot of spatial competition. For example, around 285000 km² of Belgian fishing grounds are currently designated as marine protected area (MPA), under various legislation (mainly Natura 2000). At the moment, most of these areas are still accessible for fishing activities but certain restrictions (closure, technical net adaptations...) are ready for implementation. This is visualized with the Geofish tool, with indication of the potential fishery restrictions. Besides, MPAs, the construction of wind farms is also substantially reducing the areal extent of the fishing grounds (+- 14400 km²), already causing loss of fishery grounds. By including fisheries landings data (weight and value of commercial fish) in the tool, we can also estimate possible financial loss of fishery closures. Such information is essential to support the sector in the changing maritime landscape and increased competition for space.

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